POETRY QUARTERLY

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After Every Green Thing

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EDITORIAL

In this issue we introduce two new features, an article by your long-suffering editor, for which he will get no payment, on the best books published during the quarter and space devoted to letters from readers in which they can voice all their grudges and complaints against a cruel world. Hard-hitting controversy especially welcomed. No schools, politics or religions barred. Heresies welcomed.

It is our intention also to strengthen the review section by cutting out many short notices of unimportant books and using more articles on a few carefully selected publications.

The low state of reviewing in this country has long been a matter of comment. In the long run it probably affects much less than is generally supposed both the sales of books and the true reputations of authors. After all, a review is only one man's opinion of another's—sometimes a rival for public acclamations—work. There is the ever-goading temptation of the poet manqué to show off his own brilliance at the expense of a fellow poet who has achieved the luxury of a publisher's imprint. To the adult it seems all rather childish. To the book buyer it is increasingly tiresome as book reviews are no longer to be trusted as guides to buying. The only consolation of the good poet languishing in isolation and obscurity is perhaps time, the unbiased criticism of the generations to come.

TESSA SILLARS

Do Not Take My Name In Vain

Now that I have given
My name into your mouth,
Speak it with love
Or hate, in joy or anger,
But articulate, with lips and teeth and tongue,
Its personal syllables;
Discriminate its weight and measure,
Without abbreviation, without stress;
Seize its particularity.

Breathe softly this bestowal,
Let me rest;
Take trustfully
The unpredictable diversity that in the end
identifies
The dancing star.

Now that you have taken
My name into your mouth,
Grant me, in return,
My self.

Viaticum

Only the bone,
Stripped of all caprices of the flesh,
Is still at the motionless centre of truth,
Where the balance is most delicately concentrated,
And the tension held beyond perception;
There shall the fugitive heart have rest.

Only the thought narrowed to the white bone
Shapes the word in its beginning;
Sightless, it has seen the secrets of the distance,
Speechless, it has learnt the futility of utterance,
In this final verity that precedes all striving.

Only the life seeded from the bone,
That has been returned to the winter earth,
And lain through the frost and cold, and the mild,
damp days,
Can be tenderly aware of new creation,
Its mute increase moving imperceptibly
Towards anonymous rebirth.

PIERRE EMMANUEL

From the Depths

I.

The sepulchres discreet with muffled lights
eternity stamped down with watered tread
in silence, raw-fleshed stairs and corridors
the entrails, heavy oil of walls, the floors
of skies beneath the earth, the drifting ship
with the blood's trail, in water of rose and sleep
the naked swimmers deep where music melts
with stagnant odours and weary dreams are bred.

In limbo's dead sky turn a changeless wheel,
cage whose unnumbered bars are bodies bared,
ageless, desireless, gliding, turning
fared
by that senseless logic which commands the stars,
about that dolled-up shape grotesque, the captive
of these cold walls of loins and breasts and sex,
the only face! immodest, naked, strange
amid the mind's bright clarity of Sin:
in his Gethsemane of shame he knows
now God, and anguish binds him unto Him
in Wrath; to be His son, though damned, is joy.

II.

Discord of bodies slaked by burning night
obscene the crumbling pyre on crimson beds!
Never a flame—oh stubborn movement slow
that raves in rage to its enormous peak!
Hell drips its rank luxuriant sweat, flesh
gleams in glossed cascades of oil-spilt lust.

O monstrous rock reflected by the Styx
and carved by stone's ferocious fire, cogwheel
of bodies set by pleasure, measured gasp
and gestures of no irony, precise
the frenzy wherein neither God nor chance
has meaning once the void begins to stir.
where is that witness of so many mortal
strivings, that One whose eye is your eternal
Shade, o bodies! you who think yourselves
unseen of Him, because in blindness you
by one another kneaded have become
no more than one unlimited dark flesh

abyss of flesh where even Nothing founders.

III.

Beyond the gardens poisonous and sweet—
o many-petal-touching tongue, o moist
avowal of the night's consenting lips—lies
a desert harsh of taste, a plain where winds
are stretched beneath the bow
here pleasure lifts
its chasms menacing and steep above
the enormous shuddering of mastered flesh

(the rock poised upon a hesitant breath
swings heavily: waiting, no breath dares come)

What boundless silence gathered to the point
where swift the alerted bow attacks the string,
what vigil hovering over Hell!

Magic
the vision of unreason's summer sharp
upon the bodies torn by orchid sex
against the black sky brandished by the nerves'
assailing tree, clenched on its pollen's woe
Lord
at sudden mortal thrust the landscape
falls body on body, stones gasp, the dark
triumphant twists the howling trees to death!
Then all is still.

Where ruined trumpets lie
a hand half-opened falls, a faded eye
and nothing else remains.

Translated by ALEXANDER HENDERSON

OSCAR WILLIAMS

Mirror

Champ frozen daylight through your all-eye mouth
Take care, my well of spite upon the wall,
But meet embattled on a frame of words
This ant that dragged a gulf of sophistry
To stack the state of nothing for your gorge.
Now sky's blue marrow kindles nerve and eye
I brandish perilous corridors from my past,
Peer at your inmost canyons, peer of dark.

Ah, fact, thou titbit, leave the frontier's brink
And pelt dilemma's shadows at my face.
No blaze of promise warms the vacuum's look,
This mirror's dose of light, no answer's feat,
Invites the sight to tilt at mimic's beard.
At brims of near-events, on waning knees
Of sun and moon, I drink from all's not well,
With face and sky a jig of dancing bits.

It is a World of Peek

Who is it leans above you in your dream?
The stars blow over sills of mind like ferns,
The skies compete for place in every stream,
The constellations play at taking turns.
It is a world of peek and jockeying glance,
The ice-capped distances disarmed to eyes,
Those little ballrooms where the heavens dance;
Time stumbles on such pearls to prophecies.

Turn where you will you see the world around,
Petitioners in the anterooms to you;
Over my shoulder from some higher ground
Who is it stands behind me looking too
For stamp of image on the real at last,
Reflection's bar on which the planets chin—
The colour of your eyes is shadow cast
By the angel of the outside looking in.

LOUIS ADEANE

The Monday Children

I saw the Monday children
In their sly habit walk
With innocence within them
Wild heaven in their look.
The serpent-gestured garden
Raged for their quick return,
Thunder coloured Eden:
Tinder the trees burn.
The children stole the golden
Flame from the branching skies,
I saw them walk on Monday
With apples in their eyes.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Elegiac Stanzas

In Memory of WILLIAM BELL

Fretful, with all her fine deceits of mind
About her still, and still unchanged, the city
Opens her grey heart to mild January,
With medlars and mortality in her hand;

Where in their windy towers the old men weep,
Remembering how soon the goddess fled
(Before they woke to find that youth was dead)
While she but touched their parted lips in sleep.

But I recall that Irish sorcerer—
His table set, the tall glasses of wine,
All Souls'-tide summoning at the bell's last groan
His wandering shades to a thin-fumed banquet here—

Whose lonely ceremony I need not prove,
Since pausing at the end of every street,
Rustling homewards through these skies I greet
Poems, like birds, that seek the sacred grove.

But when the night is come, from their sublime
And baroque heaven the great musicians bend:
Sebastian Bach, eternity on his mind,
And Monteverdi, between the seraphim

Yet whispering now with the year's gentlest breath—
'Zefiro torna, torna . . .'—whose complaint
Is formal landscapes and the nymph's lament,
And how spring brought no solace for her grief.

Oxford, January '49

WILLIAM BELL

Elegy 12

To-night the moon is high to summon all
the scholars, they who herald and who praise
all things beneath the ruling moon—the shaming
distempers of our blood, the rise and fall
of history with every added tear;—
to summon all the trumpeters, proclaiming
love from a higher sphere,
whom they pursue beyond our gaze;
out of their dream of drowning to call them here
to find the moonlit city they would raise.

Along the level sands, bathed by her beams
the passionate men who wander by the sea
pour to the waves the torrent of their troubles,
their tears more cold than the Norwegian streams.
Lear with marigolds in his silver hair
follows the curve of the abandoned bubbles,
Tristram in his despair
watches the empty line of sky,
and Timon as he sniffs the salty air
curses the stench of all humanity.

To-night I watched those lonely heroes weep
the interruption of their own delight,
and comforted myself: you are no woman
if you would mourn a friend who fell asleep,
charmed by the ocean's music, till the theme
grew tyrannous, the trumpeter inhuman.
I think he had his dream
without regretting, but to-night
all men are carried on a freezing stream
or wander weeping in the cold moonlight.

That moon could tell, we all must lie alone
at last among the tides of time and space.
Why do we mourn the dead? we do not pity
the million ammonites transformed to stone

and polished by the same unpitying hand
that casts the carven fragments of a city
like shells upon the sand.
Yet history's austere embrace
has only covered him that he might stand
far purer than the moon's inconstant face,

that he might stand before our Parthenon
with ever flaw we fancied washed away,
so that the surging crowds of the forgiven
may flow about his plinth, or climb upon
the platform, gazing where his face appears,
as if the crescent moon were fixed in heaven.
The tribute of your tears
and tongues is all that you can pay;
waters and songs tumble toward his ears
to cover us to-morrow or to-day,

for this is the fulfilment of your dreams,
desire that was as stealthy as a dew
now openly from the obedient ocean
invokes his tide, and from the hills their streams.
Now in the overflowing bay, among
the drifting ships, leaping in their devotion
a thousand dolphins throng,
and with the same devotion you
no longer flee the destroying flood of song,
the music of the scholars, but pursue,

pursue the flowing trumpet till you see,
more generous than the tritons of a spring,
the steadfast heralds, drowned in blood and bleeding,
who still proclaim: 'the tide of history
must drown the glittering city of the mind,
but in remotest centuries receding
will leave a coast behind,
where once again the brooks will sing,
where in his nets the fisherman will find
a triton's marble mouth still trumpeting'.

But do not watch the moon's enraging face.
For all our folly nothing intercedes
save only love. Love is another planet
islanded in the purity of space,
but there upon that island, torn or hewed
or grown miraculously from the granite,
eternally pursued,
upon his saltire Andrew bleeds,
preaching to the obedient multitude,
and the moon dips and drowns, but no man heeds.

ALEXANDER HENDERSON

The Wind

The wind that blew this month, to spite the sun
whose warmth we knew could melt our loneliness,
has blown through all my streets,
through every year and place,
and shakes the doors of dim, deserted rooms.

In every silence spoke the subtle wind,
bringing distraction, pulling thoughts aside
to peer over the wall
that folds all Time away
in one expanding parkland of the past.

The wind has been my colleague; I, the wind,
the sun, the night, and the summer season's dust,
have heard the shutter creak,
observed the swinging light
on the white wall, felt the stone of the floor.

The wind is those past days of old defeat
when I, who was this I, and yet another,
foresaw a destined end,
but would not understand
no will of mine could leash the flowing clouds.

The wind blew from the desert, cold as jade;
the many graves were grit between our teeth,
and from our eyes their stone
crushed out as many tears
as we would need, or shed for last-night sorrow.

The wind blew from the sea and milled the waves
white as our solitude in that small room
where side by side we lay,
together, yet apart,
each knowing that our time of joy was past.

The wind blew from Asia with a harsh voice
and a cruel hand; higher thrust the sky
beyond our daily blue,
and burnished it, like glass
sterile, or gold, or days of selfish glee.

That was a torturer wind, twisting cords
of fear and jealousy about my head,
wrenching away my faith
in loyalty and trust,
asserting there could be no love again.

Always the wind was summer,
was mine, since I was the wind, striding, striding
through lonely avenues
of lights and sleeping doors
and trees by moonlight fingered all distraught.

The wind went walking into the dark funnel
that never closes, into the night silence
that smoothes its silk again
as rubies dwindle, small
in darkness after roar of hurried wheels.

The wind was thin behind the garden railings,
ambling about the square, coughing and yawning
under the rain-streaked trees,
doing the washing-up
and grumbling at the bills one afternoon.

Within the wind I could make nothing grow;
oh, why did they all die, my gentle ferns?
even the cactus die
under my longing hands?
Nothing was left to me but empty earth.

Now the wind blows again through one more summer,
paces another street in one more city,
and tries with old commands
to shake my new-built walls
behind whose shade my ferns at last shall grow.

May there be tenderness now, may the wind
shrivel no longer, and the empty earth
surrender pride of stone,
complacency of self,
and yield to green entreaty of my love.

The wind has heard, the wind blows back upon
the past in other voice, and all is changed:
now my new present makes
my old past new, and brings
forgiveness for the avenues of cities

walked by night alone, for the many rooms
in many places, the quarrels, the hatred,
for pleasure and its triumph,
for carelessness of pain,
for words spoken, and comfort never given.

* * *

Pity the brave, the generous, the foolish,
oh, pity the generous above all:
they know not what they do,
nor that we can't survive
the swift and sweet aggression of their dreams.

No, I'll not envy them, the generous ones,
nor in tears regret I gave not, as they
continually gave;

for theirs was not a road
which I could use to reach the final truth

which now I find, and take, and recognize.
By different ways we came to this one place:
mine was the hollow heart,
stone of the desert wold,
and theirs the sun-flushed, shuddering young seas.

But now I too have reached the singing sands:
below the dunes the water lies alone,
water of tenderness
waiting for eyes and hands,
far from the hammering wind, the frost-dark stone.

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

New Year's Eve

The frost has built an ice bridge
Over the lake round our house
Where the wild duck swam in warm weather.
The wild duck that roused us each morning
Have flown away to the river.

It has been a sick season: but grief passes
Out of the winter door. Fish-eyed women
Walk from the shaken tapestry of the hall.
Shrouded and grey, very old,
The year goes too, leaving the heart
Waiting for the wingbeat, the new foot on
the threshold.

In December already
The Spring tide turns: rises,
Freed from the earth, green buds on his hands,
The Angel of Revelation.

HUGO MANNING

There is this Great Show

There is this great show, tempestuous, and
There are shadows on the screen
Writhing
Writhing

Galanty of Eros and
Galanty of horror
Where the blind children, Cimmerii,
Rush to their ruin

Alastor
Làstima

We are dust in a cold drum, and
We do not unbuild
Horror, blindness with shining hands, and
We do not unweave, but build
Omega, an end, with haggard hands

The wild rhetoric of power woos gravity and
motion and
The death-man at the door is
Dancing
Dancing

O God-man and beast-man mixed in your
loves
Do not disturb the sleep of lightning
Do not disturb the dream of doves
Without supreme reason

Latria
Selah

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Poems are as Butterfly or Moth

Poems disturb mind's
Mirror-surface as butterfly
And moth that ravage
Flowers in undefended gardens.

Reason's tail snaps
The snail of rhyme,
Flays dragon-fly incantations:
Moon-minted images that fade
In hunchback cloud,
Fade as sheaved stars
In day's impersonal glare.

Interruption's cockle
Chokes frail seed:
Too late the scavenger
Scrapes his wit
On unrewarding stone.

So falls the net
Upon mute theme and player,
And in a nightmare
Of unprompting wings
The moth eclipses butterfly,
In token flight
Round a dead bouquet.

T. H. JONES

Poem

The hand that dreams of poems by my side
My violent friend who dreams me in the dark
Blood-spilling down the pathways of the stars
Seed-scattering in many a summer field
Could conquer kingdoms, burn tall cities down
Or lay a benediction on the breasts
Of her who lies so white and dreamless in my sleep.

What is the monstrous imagining
That could so move this curved and passionate friend
To such tall deeds? what is the hidden metre
That moves these crooked bones? what song
Sings in the nerves and moans along the blood
Impelling them to vast and prodigal deeds?

Only the slim curved whiteness of the hands
The bones' strength and the sensitive fingertips
Whorled round their mystery, revealing nothing,
Can spell the answer in a frantic scribble
Or in curved gentleness around her breasts.

My passionate ally dreaming at my side
Conceiving poems in my chapelled dark
Apocalyptic fingers grasping stars
And scattering their seed across the summer
White hand, curved hand, o dreaming hand
Be always passionate for me, and dream
Me poems down the pathways of the stars.

JEAN BEARN

Golden Boy and Golden Dolphin

A golden boy on the back of a golden dolphin,
riding into the white mists of an illimitable sea.
That is all we, the watchers, see, but the boy himself,
whose eyes are bright and shining with life's adventures —
what vistas, what horizons appear before him?

> The dolphin moves slowly over the face of the waters
> until they are curved softly into horses of foam.
> There is no man on this sea: only a child and a golden
> monster,
> and both child and monster are fantasy.

But if they were to come alive into this world, our world,
the world of skies, and suns, and fountains,
how would they look at us, they with their star-opened eyes?
For we, on our little, silent earth,
have lost the joys of love, and music and motion.
Our love is enwrapped with fear, our music with discord,
and the poetry of our limbs is turned to iron and steel.

> But in the land of the boy with the dolphin there is peace,
> peace, and the great calm of a rested sleep,
> the sleep that only the sons of the gods can know.
> There was a time when golden boy and dolphin
> would have travelled across the oceans to our lands;
> they would have told strange tales of frozen music,
> of dancers turned to air, of wings and falcons.
> Tales that the old men would have wondered at,
> and made fear and joy friends in the hearts of far-off
> lovers.

But now the dolphin has taken his way home,
and it is only in magic, the magic of a purely golden heart
that we can see, can see, the golden child turn back and smile
upon us, from the mist on the white-waved sea.

R. E. F. LARSSON

Poem

(so I hope): The slow
flowers as slow as
spring is under trees

though all the feet of boys
rush faster than wind
and the first arbutus

(so they hope) are not like
the sun who
rises and sends the colours of the

spring forth into the first
arbutus and rouses all the boys
to be spring and wind

rushing the sun
(and the sun's laughter
where it first has been)

to the first arbutus
lest it also fade, and
the last lest there be autumn

and the sun forget the wind
and the wind forget
colours (and they remember the dead).

CHARLES HIGHAM

Truth on the Mountain

She sits alone amid the yellow vases
washed by the hands of wind, and in her eyes
linger wild shadow-songs, under the marble
rock, the green cloud-foam and the netless skies.

She has been born in deserts where the hungry
lion roars, licking the sun, drinking the twilight;
she has been born in fish-dark coral towers,
where perfume drifts, and fluted halls declaim
their sorrows, for her heart is old as flame,
or emerald trees, start in the senseless haze.

She makes us feel in every sigh she lets
plumb slow as feather-frost a nerveless deep
the worm that twists to riddle our façades
and break the foolish glass of happiness,
the equal hours, hid in a brilliant dress,
our falsity, our singing, and our dawn.

O thus for all eternity she sits,
washed by the tears of heaven; in her eyes
linger the shadows of the ones she cherished,
and told, and broke the heart in, through the years.

B. HAMILTON

Country Night

Sounds comfort the night, are pillows to sleepers:
The querulous chirp of a bird
Drowsily starving and freezing,
Demonstrative shriek of a hare
Giddily twisting and bleeding.
They are not men, we not their brothers, keepers,
Losers, weepers.

BERNARD GILES

Summer

The small licentious showers that pattered
On her nakedness are with her girlhood passed:
And the sharp lusts that drove the bud to leaf,
In the cruel sap aching like a childish hunger,
Uncertain as the small winds of springtime,
Are with the springtime passed.

Skilled in the needs of cruelty and of love
And the violent lust coiled like a spring for its
kind release,
Like an old rare whore grown wise beyond despair,
Now in the yellow noon she sprawls,
In her wisdom stupid and perhaps a little drunk:
Sleeps through the hot afternoon, holding all
Her creatures in her fat and dreaming arms;
And cannot know the crooked from the straight
Nor tell a client from a son:
And is become the tolerant summer, calls
All her creatures 'love'—

Only the sudden thunder storms
Her like a memory of rage.

RICHARD TRUDGETT

Helen

She is the rose that stains the wave,
The sapling bending in the sun,
The golden Greek. The cold, eternal girl
Who naked stretches in the grave
And taunts the sleep of lovers.
Some may describe her fabled breasts
As beasts that spring upon the helpless flesh
and run to towers
Or hide in terraces.

Others may watch the raven
Fly across the spinning sea
And hear no echo from the leaping wing,
Yet some must carry Helen in the eye
And never find the living glass
That does not shatter
In the desolate embrace,
But Helen cannot die
She is the bride for ever in the blood
And for the whispers of her love
Men must make their wars.

BURNS SINGER

Dead End

All road I rest me is at last past rest
By law and artifice of the blackleg heart
With all its brawn's employment huddling east,
Mattress and kettle in its rattling cart.

Call all discoverers to death at five
From roads to roads to where the old roads led
Their sultry gangs through cannon-lines alive,
Now lined up backwards, crablike along the dead.

Call them all back. Quiet ouright. End.
Let there be solitude. O let there be
A stile's contentment in the hedge's gland
While the spring roosts, the road stops suddenly.

THE POETRY OF LOUIS MACNEICE

LOUIS MACNEICE is a typical poet of modern civilization: that is surely why he cannot be a pure poet, though occasionally he has written short lyrics of intense pureness of imagery that merely fringe the actual world. For the most part he has incorporated the externals and dilemmas of contemporary life into his work; and indeed for the poet of social and political awareness (at least during youth) this could hardly be otherwise.

His early poetry largely used the material of the thirties: social distress, political *malaise*, the vulgarization of the countryside by petrol-pump and road-house, the continual examination and assessment of one's own position as a fairly responsible human being. MacNeice has then (and since) been accused of sitting on the fence, of wanting it both ways: and indeed there is a certain truth in the accusation, so long as it is not pushed too far. Yet it must be admitted that his refusal to join the Left partisans in the thirties—while agreeing with a Socialist diagnosis of society—derived from a fundamental intellectual honesty, a refusal to be hustled into the Party. To a Communist lady he wrote:

> *But before you proclaim the millennium, my dear,*
> *Consult the barometer—*
> *This poise is perfect, but maintained*
> *For one day only.*

His stand, then, was for the humanities—he is a scholar of the Classics, 'an impresario of the ancient Greeks'—for a certain minimum of human decency which, disillusioned and sometimes cynical as he was, he believed could yet be salvaged from the coming disintegration of Western Europe:

> *Our freedom as free lances*
> *Advances towards the end;*
> *The earth compels, upon it*
> *Sonnets and birds descend;*
> *And soon, my friend,*
> *We shall have no time for dances.*

The sky was good for flying
Defying the church bells
And every evil iron
Siren and what it tells:
The earth compels,
We are dying, Egypt, dying . . .

In the end, however, with the sky finally darkening, and the air-raid shelters springing up like ugly coffins, he was forced to declare at the time of Munich, in 1938:

And at this hour of the day, it is no use saying
'Take away this cup';
Having helped to fill it ourselves, it is only logic
That now we should drink it up.

Co-existent with a willingness to face the facts, however unpleasant, MacNeice had a certain tendency to wear a Byronic mask of inscrutable casualness; he tried to give the impression that since humanity was so blindly seeking destruction, it probably deserved what it was about to get. But the playboy, double-whisky-and-soda attitude hid a deep concern with the human predicament: a concern that emerges, parallel with its personal under-theme of broken love, in his long poem *Autumn Journal*. This poem also shows MacNeice as master of the poetic Higher Journalism; yet the operative word is 'poetic', for in spite of slangy phrases, colloqualisms and inverted clichés—remember his *Homage to Clichés*—the journal appears for what it is, the work of a highly civilized man undergoing great personal stress.

The classical background largely accounts for MacNeice's dominant intellectual attitude which a contemporary critic has summed up as a 'broad and genial humanism', a humanism whose market-value he himself has neatly described:

Better authentic Mammon than a bogus God;
If it were not for Lit.Hum. I might be climbing
A ladder with a hod.

In the phrase 'bogus God' we have the biographical reminder that MacNeice's father was a Church of Ireland Bishop; and he has protested energetically against the commercialization of Christ, against the departmental-store Christmas with its 'old tinsel and frills', one to which the masses respond with a vague and sentimental *bonhomie*.

The occasional formal excellence of MacNeice's poetry—his handling of internal rhyme, his vigorous rhythms (as in the hilarious ballad poem, *Bagpipe Music*)—have been sometimes obscured by a certain carelessness, possibly a by-product of the 'journalistic' element. This accent on form comes, presumably, from the fusion of neo-Drydenism and Graeco-Roman classicism; but behind the elegant marble façade one sees the essentially romantic poet, spontaneous on his highest level, slapdash on his lowest. The unevenness in style has been noted by various critics; Francis Scarfe has this to say in his study *Auden and After*:

> *Louis MacNeice is a stylist, in the best sense, and one who, by his attempt at grasping the rougher realities of modern life, has on occasion deliberately written in a loose and carefree manner . . . That does not alter the fact that he can also write with exceptional purity, and that in the total composition of a poem he has a mature architectural sense. But he is not single-minded, and for that reason will provide a successor neither to Eliot nor Dryden.*

If Louis MacNeice had not been public-schooled in Dorset and Oxford-universalized he would have been an Ulsterman—an Ulsterman with a drop of dark Connaught-Spanish blood. Yet MacNeice cannot be considered an uprooted man except in the sense that we are all uprooted in a world of debased values, in a general society that has nothing but the lash and the gag for that non-conformist, the artist.

The poem *Carrickfergus* gives us an early piece of autobiography:

> *I was born in Belfast to the hooting of lost sirens*
> *And the clang of trams . . .*

MacNeice realizes that though 'schooled from the age of ten to a foreign voice' he is not quite English. Behind his *littorae humaniores* there exists a directness that may best be described as 'peasant'. That patient solidity constitutes one of the principal Ulster qualities in his work; even in his less successful poems one finds fundamentalness, sparingness. He does not throw away the potato peelings. And it may have been that relative nearness to the peasant mind which prevented him taking a definite Left-wing stand in such movements as the struggle towards a Popular Front.

There and elsewhere he has revealed the reservations of 'the jut-lipped farmer gazing over the humpbacked wall'.

In *Valediction* one finds an assessment of what Ireland gave; and of what she took away:

> *See Belfast, devout and profane and hard,*
> *Built on reclaimed mud, hammers playing in the*
> *shipyard,*
> *Time punched with holes like a steel sheet, time*
> *Hardening the faces, veneering with a grey and*
> *speckled rime*
> *The faces under the shawls and caps:*
> *This was my mother-city, these my paps.*

And later the accusing finger:

> *. . . I would call you to book*
> *I would say to you, Look;*
> *I would say, This is what you have given me*
> *Indifference and sentimentality.*
> *A metallic giggle, a fumbling hand*
> *A heart that leaps to a fife band.*

There can be no forgetting the cursed spite of being born in Ireland. Disclaim the old lady, denounce her as you will, the martyred dead on both sides and round towers and spiralling talk cannot be cancelled out. On the hand dexter:

> *I will acquire an attitude not yours*
> *And become as one of your holiday visitors,*
> *And however often I come*
> *Farewell, my country, and in perpetuum.*

And on the hand sinister:

> *Cursèd be he that curses his mother. I cannot be*
> *Anyone else than what this land engendered me.*

Despite his early clerical environment or because of it MacNeice does not appear to subscribe to any of those organized bodies of belief and worship we call religions. But what Ulsterman can be indifferent to at least the trappings of 'religion'? Inverted-comma'd religion shakes the dour North of Ireland into periodic Hottentot frenzies, culminating with an Orange orgy every

Twelfth of July. Like Milton's Satan, the Pope steals the show every 'Twalfth', as it is locally pronounced; the dummy figure in the Vatican appears more omnipotent and real to Protestant than Catholic, for fear is a stronger emotion than respect. In *Belfast*, MacNeice, wishing a hearty plague on both their houses, translates topography into a series of religious symbols:

Down there at the end of the melancholy lough
Against the lurid sky over the stained water
Where hammers clang murderously on the girders
Like crucifixes the gantries stand.

. . .

In the porch of the chapel before the garish Virgin
A shawled factory-woman as if shipwrecked there
Lies a bunch of limbs glimpsed in the cave of gloom
By us who walk in the street so buoyantly and glib.

Over such country of cowled and haunted faces
The sun goes down with a banging of Orange drums
While the male kind murders each its woman
To whose prayer for oblivion answers no Madonna.

MacNeice views the West of Ireland with a glad, welcoming eye, stone ditches, mist and all; the North with an occasionally angry eye. He adores Dublin of the Georgian squares, of the squalid glitter, of the easy, unpunctual, devil-may-care ways. But there are many hints of non-acceptance, eventual renunciation; he will not allow himself to be taken in by the fast, silk-stockinged charm, for he has discovered 'the steel behind the laugh':

This was never my town,
I was not born nor bred
Nor schooled here and she will not
Have me alive or dead.
But yet she holds my mind
With her seedy elegance,
With her gentle veils of rain
And all her ghosts that walk
And all that hide behind
Her Regency façades—
The catcalls and the pain.
The glamour of her squalor
The bravado of her talk.

What then distinguishes MacNiece's Ulster-ness—and it is of course only one of his facets—from the Irish-ness of most Southern Irish poets? It is said that F. R. Higgins, a Southern poet, asked him: 'Does your kind of poet never sing?' MacNeice retorted: 'Does your kind of poet never think?' There you have it. MacNeice is the cerebral poet *par excellence,* crammed but not suffocated by theories and ideologies. But he will not accept the ready-made in thought; he observes and duly incorporates into his verse the fifty-shilling-tailor (or its present equivalent) attitude of others, but he himself shops in more fastidious stores. He prefers occasional dryness of phrase to the rich and somewhat empty boom of organ music whether in Gothic or cinema style. So far as Ireland is concerned, ideologists of every camp might learn from his work something of that tolerance which is the true mark of civilized man. But then it does not seem that Irishmen, so fond of recounting past deeds and misdeeds, learn very much from history.

Of MacNeice's later work the volume *Springboard* (poems 1941-1944) may be considered the least satisfactory. The first reason is probably that in this period when the War had developed into an *impasse* his mind was obsessed by the attempt to rationalize what cannot be rationalized, except by a Dr. Goebbels —the impersonal brutality and stupidity of modern war; the second that he was beginning to find his way in radio drama. (It is surely obvious that he is the pioneer of the poetic radio play which has since been taken up by others such as Rayner Heppenstall, Terence Tiller and Patric Dickinson; but a consideration of his work at the B.B.C. is outside the scope of this essay.)

An example of the bad poetry in *Springboard* is *Swing-Song,* with its pseudo-'popular' refrain—the kind of thing the poetry-for-the-people boys attempted on the whole unsuccessfully:

> *I'm only a wartime working girl,*
> *The machine shop makes me deaf,*
> *I have no prospects after the war*
> *And* my *young man is in the R.A.F.*
>
> *K for Kitty calling P for Prue . . .*
> *Bombs Doors Open*
> *Over to You.*

This is an unfortunate lapse of taste in a poet of MacNeice's stature, though it may be amusing as a parlour game. In any case,

it seems impossible to create a people's poetry in an urban civilization such as ours which no longer has a vital folk-song background. The really fine poem in the collection, *Brother Fire,* skilfully invests the ephemeral imagery of an air-raid aftermath with symbolic values:

O delicate walker, babbler, dialectician Fire
O enemy and image of ourselves,
Did we not on those mornings after the All Clear,
When you were looting shops in elemental joy
And singing as you swarmed up city block and
spire,
Echo your thought in ours? 'Destroy! Destroy!'

This excellent poem may incidentally be contrasted with *The Trolls,* with its unsuccessful air-raid imagery.

Holes in the Sky, his last collection of poetry, is on balance much superior to *Springboard.* In *The Streets of Laredo* he once again rings the changes with his fire images, but, unlike the poem quoted above, it has its foundation in balladry. One notices in it that bitter-sweet tang so usual in his verse:

O early one morning I walked out like Agag,
Early one morning to walk through the fire
Dodging the pythons that leaked on the pavements
With tinkle of glass and tangle of wire;

When grimed to the eyebrows I met an old fireman
Who looked at me wryly and thus did he say:
'The streets of Laredo are closed to all traffic,
We won't never master this joker to-day . . .

In another effective poem, *Godfather,* he uses a trick ending, but one that (unlike those of commercial short stories) need not be resented, for the trick is inherent in life:

Adept
At all surprises, disguises, to conjure a Christmas
Packet
Into a stocking unnoticed or make without fussing
His first call ever and leave
Pale stone tablets like visiting cards in the churchyard.

The longer poems of MacNeice's more recent phases are less sharply-focussed than certain of his earlier work of the same kind: *The Kingdom*, for instance, seems a little blurred as against the early *Eclogues*. Good poets usually make good philosophers, but they must take care not to be caught in the act of philosophizing: otherwise they might as well write in prose and challenge the academic philosophers on their own ground. In *The Kingdom* the most telling phrases are the lyrical. Contrast the two kinds:

> *A country-lover and very English, the cadence*
> *Of Christmas bells in his voice, his face like*
> *Cotswold stone*

and

> *. . . the family*
> *Felt that this was an Act of God and did not see*
> *The syllogism slouched across the kitchen table.*

The English working-class family referred to in the second of these would be a rather peculiar one if its members could see such an object (or an 'ism' of any kind) sprawling across the kitchen table. Yet, with its flaws, *The Kingdom* is obviously one of those poems that had to be written out of his system; and it is valuable in showing that the occasionally too-clever young man of the 'thirties has disappeared for good.

In his *Elegy for Minor Poets* MacNeice speaks for those who 'tripped their hurdles' and he seeks to praise them 'in company with the Great'. And why not? Although Auden once reminded us that we know the rank of every poet only too well, the history of poetry is not merely a matter of canonizing 'the Great'; we must honour all those who have, in varying degree, contributed to the tradition. It would be much too early (as well as too risky) to try to decide whether Louis MacNeice will qualify for minor or major rank: that he is a poet who has not as yet given himself to *pastiche* of his early self is certainly a very encouraging sign. As he himself remarks:

> *Let us keep our minds open, our fingers crossed;*
> *Some who go dancing through dark bogs are lost.*

ROBERT GREACEN.

THE ISOLATION OF THE POET

In recent months the isolation of the poet has been the subject of comment by critics and others in sympathy with poetry. Such comment, well meaning as it may have been, has served merely to emphasize a fact without indicating a remedy. Poetry, it is admitted, has become the language of a dwindling minority, and this is true not only of contemporary work; poetry in general is implicated. There is a steadily growing tendency on the part of the reading public to turn its back upon the art as a whole. That poetry never was in the modern sense of the word 'popular' does not alter the principal argument of these sympathetic observers, the argument that poetry is coming to be regarded as a backwater of an already spent tradition. Nash, Greene, and their coterie, staggering precariously between the gutter, the tavern, and the brothel, had more social validity as poets than the earnest group of teachers, clerks, advertising underwriters and the like, struggling to keep poetry alive to-day.

The future of the poet is as much in question as the future of his art, for an increasingly unfavourable environment is the shadow of extinction, as certainly in the world of aesthetics as biology. Eliot has said that the contemporary poet must 'live the life of his time', but how far and for how long the life of his time will permit the writing of good poetry is another matter. Aware of the growing difficulties in the poet's way, certain critics insist that only a change in social values can save poetry. Somewhere, sometime, somehow, a change of heart must occur and reprieve poetry in a general liberating phase of history—a healing anarchy. This attitude is scarcely convincing, since History shows that of all things changing, the human heart is the most tardy. To the young poets of this generation, the change-of-heart advocates are little more than prophets of doom. No poet chooses to be a spare time performer. He needs the chance given to the painter and the composer to earn a living by the practice of his art. Consequently, he observes his social environment, studies its politics and surveys its day to day activities for a sign that the eclipse of poetry is passing. What he sees usually drives him to the poetry of pessimism and regret, or of defiance and futile hope; or it ends in his departure for other fields in which he can earn money and public respect.

Living the ordinary life of this time means for the poet a lack of continuity, since the writing of poetry demands long periods of incubation, in which the poet must be free to meditate his themes. It is not that the environment is necessarily unsuitable, or that the poet in a suburban atmosphere is essentially at odds with his environment. The difference between the social backgrounds of Wordsworth and Beaudelaire is distinctive, but they had the opportunities given by time to absorb their material and select from it what was useful. Their days were not squandered in offices or schools, and they were not conscious of duties to society, other than those which lay within the scope of their work as poets. Beaudelaire, it is true, had to struggle against the 'official' mind, but such is commonly the fate of the innovator. The outposts of thoughts are held by the few to whom being misunderstood and pilloried are expected obstacles. Beaudelaire's struggle was not against the indifference but against the stupidity of society, and stupidity is a social element without which the dull and depressing work of the world could scarcely be done.

The poetry of Beaudelaire, and to a lesser extent of Wordsworth, was attacked by those who imagined they were acting in defence of the sacred art of poetry. It was a belief in tradition without an understanding of tradition which awakened hostility. People wanted poetry, but they did not want to be disturbed by change, or forced to look beyond the limits of their comfortable prejudices. Culture, which is the total influence of all the arts, has always been synonymous with spiritual comfort to the bland hosts of enquiring middle-brows, careful not to push their enquiries too far.

Our own democratic society abounds in people who offer culture as a comforting sop, and at any moment clergymen, teachers, business men and politicians are liable to break out in frothy support of this mysterious element in our social make-up. The difference between a poet's view of 'culture' and that of a politician, moved to soften his discourse with a degree of sentiment, is naturally fundamental. But the politician gets a hearing, the poet does not. Thus 'culture' appears to the average man as something occasional like a dish of hors d'oevre, a mere garnishment which in any case pays no dividends. It is non-productive, does not appear in the balance sheet, and therefore cannot be taken seriously. In this world of genial misapprehension, the poet is tolerated with good humour. Obviously, the forces of production are too much for even the boldest of poets,

and there is thus no harm done. Besides, England is the home of great poets, as the world well knows. All of them are, of course, quite dead, but the Poet's Corner in the Abbey does help to earn a few tourist dollars, and money for poetical dust is still money.

Little as it may do for a poet, a democratic society does leave him a measure of personal freedom. Indifference, which is the mould and substance of tolerance, sees to that. In totalitarian states, a different attitude is essentially present. There the poet has a precise rôle assigned to him, a rôle which is compatible with political necessity. In the Soviet Union the poet, in common with other artists, has a Marxian value. He is not so much a creator as an interpreter, and his principal work is to make clear the point of liquidation in the art of the dark ages which threw up the Revolution. He must assist the masses in forming a vision of the economic paradise. Pie must lose its ethereal character and be brought to earth. It is the work of the artist not to explore profoundly but to dam the waters of tradition into a warm and shallow spate, in which all can wash their tired and dirty feet. For their part, the masses are expected to learn the principle of acceptance until belief grows blindly from repetition. The nature of this 'acceptance' is not difficult to comprehend. Is is simply that everything which emphasizes the validity of Marx is worthy, and all critical scepticism is bourgeois and degenerate. (In modern politics that priceless word 'bourgeois' has done more than any other to obscure the need of definition.) A politically conscious, regimented public gives the artist one clear choice—he must co-operate or perish.

Co-operation between the poet and the people is fundamental to the health of poetry, but such a unity must be above coercion, and must arise from genuine need on both sides. Poetry must regain intrinsic value in a technocratic society. Marketable commodities are the life blood of an industrial community. Unfortunately, the more complex becomes the problem of production and exchange, the less important seem the non-utilitarian elements. If books of poetry do not sell, it is rational to suppose that they will cease to be produced, except as luxuries by those who can afford publication without a public. This is precisely what has happened during the last two decades. The poet has been pushed gradually away from the centre of social importance, but his increasing isolation, unlike that of the Romantics, is not of his own seeking. Despite public neglect, the poets of the last twenty years have been politically more aware than any

since the eighteenth century. The poet to-day has become a hanger-on, tolerated under the democratic principle of 'live and let live.' In the long run this is worse for him than active persecution. A Soviet poet, defying the State to the point of starvation or the firing squad, might be expected to produce better work than a British clerk of equal talent, whose poems are rarely printed and whose morale is upheld by a few sympathetic friends. In short, Democracy, which has brought poetry low through neglect, is now tolerating it into its grave.

What genuine hope for poetry is there to be found when the facts have gone their weary rounds? Day Lewis's hope filled a thin book, but he failed to show a distinction between a hope for the poet and a hope for poetry. They are not necessarily the same thing, for to-day a poet can hope to earn a living—at an enormous cost to his poetry. In the early thirties C. Henry Warren appealed in the Radio Times to the B.B.C. to step in and help in a revival of interest in poetry. Warren stressed two points as essential to such a revival: *the poet must be enabled to live by his work* and the B.B.C. must 'give us modern poetry, lots of it, and all kinds'. They were not to mind 'the consequent howlings of enraged listeners', in this endeavour to create the necessary conditions in which poetry could hope to survive. Nearly twenty years have passed and neither condition has been fulfilled. True, we do indeed get more poetry but, as Warren had it, 'usually from "standard authors" who, being dead, are safe, and whose poetry now costs nothing, being out of copyright'. A whole nation listening to Marlowe and Milton does not help the contemporary poet to live, does not feed a Dylan Thomas or provide a Gascoyne with a new suit of clothes. Nor does it of itself provide that healthy knowledge of tradition as continuity, without which any art must ultimately languish. That can only be done by the continual work of re-creation. The Phoenix is the eternal symbol of developing art.

Clearly, there is only one answer to the problem of the poet's isolation. There is one solution and one only. There must be an increasing support for his work by a large section of the reading public, and until this is forthcoming, the fate of poetry must remain in the hands of a few whose work will continue to be inexplicable to the mass of mankind. The poet has lost his patrons, his public, and above all that powerful means of social communication, the theatre. Prose is the language of an industrial community, and as prose gradually captured the stage, it robbed

the poet of both a platform for his ideas and a valuable means of livelihood. The example before us of both democracy and totalitarianism seems to show that the idea of salvation through mere political change is futile, and there can be no value in retracing the steps taken by Auden and his friends. Without rancour or explanation, our modern Republic is applying the sanctions of Plato. The technician, the scientist, the civil servant, and the politician now claim the limelight as the darlings of our contemporary industrial Eden, while the unacknowledged legislators of the world are left to seek unheeded some Tibetan hinterland of the spirit. The last line of *Paradise Lost* aptly describes their progress.

EDGAR FOXALL.

BOOKS OF THE QUARTER

THE book of the greatest importance to readers of poetry this quarter is a volume of collected criticisms by C. M. Bowra, *The Creative Experiment.* After *The Heritage of Symbolism,* a similar collection published six years ago on the poetry of Valéry, Rilke, George, Blok and Yeats, we turn with pleasant expectation to this examination of the work of a later generation. There is an interesting preliminary essay which gives its name to the book. The first half of the twentieth century —how university professors adore the first halves and the last halves of centuries—was certainly a period of experiment in the creative arts and those academicians who will not recognize it will be figures of fun to later generations, their pastiche of the wrong period in the past held up to ridicule like the Edwardian belles with purple robes and doves on the finger still exposed by some art shops in London. Dr. Bowra has always insisted on the undeniable truth that poetry lives and thrives by change, the simple process of the reaction of each generation to the too long established reiterations of the preceding one. What the critics of this kind of progression will not admit is that it is not a matter of values at all but just simply of anno domini. The great and the little remain the same century by century but the clothing of their minds changes with the decades. Very few of us can afford to skip. Of the seven poets treated here only perhaps two

of them can be said to be known to the ordinary reader. Cavafy, like other Greeks poets in spite of their great excellence, is not much read here; Apollinaire, though he has been published, is not much more than a name to most people, who probably remember more about his trepanned head than what was in it. Mayakovsky, though probably a great man, belongs to a pre-1914 Futorist movement happily forgotten. Pasternak, a very great genius, was certainly a greater prose writer than a poet—this was a creative age in prose experiment too. The study of Eliot's *Waste Land* is good except for the very feeble attempt to make excuses for Pound, who was a much greater poet than any of those treated here, with the possible but not by any means definite exception of Eliot. Of gypsy *Lorca* we have had, perhaps too much. Blood must always look nasty on fresh sand, but in hot countries it dries up very quickly. Alberti is almost entirely unknown anywhere. So the best book of the quarter is, after all, something of a disappointment. We hope all the same that Dr. Bowra will try again. There were a lot more poets in the first half of the twentieth century.

Next in importance this quarter is a biography of a Victorian poet. As the eighteenth century was the land of escape for the nineteenth, so the Victorians have become for us the *pays de cocaigne* of the escaper from the contemporary totalitarian breakdown of civilization. *The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore* is by his great grandson, Derek Patmore. Most of us will be very lucky indeed if we have a great grandson who is literate enough to write about us. Derek Patmore's opening sentence puts the case of truth as against fiction: 'The story of a family can be as fascinating as any novel'. Why, in fact, do people write novels when the magnificent material of history is there before us as something worth having, like the Essays of Montaigne, the Diary of Harry Crosby or the cathedral of Chartres. Those who prefer fiction to truth are a race of poor hacks and bookstall readers. Just after the 1914-18 war a great many things were said about the Victorians which were untrue. They were supposed to be prudish, hypocritical and stupid, which, if possible, they were in a much less degree than the generation of to-day. Coventry Patmore sold more copies of his poems than many novelists do of their 'fiction' in this century, he had more wives than some film stars and he is still interesting for both his matter and his manner, particularly in his later poems such as *The Unknown Eros* and in

his little-known prose work *The Rod, the Root and the Flower* to this generation. And Mr. Derek Patmore's biography is a very readable and delightful account of a strange life in a century of eccentrics, how much more so than nearly all contemporary fiction.

The last on this short list of the most important books of this quarter is no more than a paper pamphlet. It is *Demos the Emperor,* a Secular Oratorio by Osbert Sitwell, and I mention it because it may not be noticed in the great noise of applause on the appearance of the last volume of his monumental autobiography. Now that the poetry of Edith Sitwell has become academic and respectable and Sacheverell is known as the author of the most curious prose-poetry of our times, it may be forgotten that Osbert is also a poet. I believe that in *Demos the Emperor* he may be found to be the most modern of the three. His language has a whip-lash accuracy and clarity of diction, and he gets to grips with the horrible truth of our times without evasion or preciousness. Here is a man who stands armed against the Philistine. His choruses are little masterpieces of economical comment on the action of the poem.

What has Demos granted them?
An equal share, enough of everything
To fill a coffin.
What is this life?
A preparation for the deaths of others.

The recitative of the journalists touting their foul wares, those who were first to see the corpses exploding like roses in the black night, and Mr. Stuttenheimer, Mr. Bozentrimmer, the last in Hiroshima, the last in Berlin watching

the tanks
Ride over men and build a bridge of bones,
Hot news, world over!

and the people

who are
The arbiters, the heirs
Of Egypt, Greece and Italy
(We have no time for art
But we know what we like.)
We are the soul of the Cash Register,
The Secret of the Hire Purchase System,
The Vaccum, and the Vacuum-Cleaner.

I am terribly afraid that this little paper book of twenty pages will be overlooked by the people who have brought our reviewing to its nadir. This dramatic poem merits the attention of the honest anarchist mass of humanity which does not acquiesce in its own sacrifice to the bloody jaws of the dirty success hounds of our two worlds of corruption labelled Democracy and Communism.

WREY GARDINER.

BOOKS REVIEWED

The Creative Experiment, C. M. BOWRA (Macmillan, 15s.); *The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore*, DEREK PATMORE (Constable, 15s.); *Demos the Emperor*, OSBERT SITWELL (Macmillan, 2s. 6d.).

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, OR SENSE AND SENSIBILITY?

A consideration of some anthologies of contemporary verse

ROBERT GRAVES and Laura Riding once produced *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*. Having just compiled an anthology of contemporary verse myself I must still confess to a certain sympathy with their objections! Anthologies are no longer private garnerings but public selections, invidiously comparative and at best partial: partial in that they cannot hope to reveal the full genius or talent of the contributors; more dangerously partial when they reflect the anthologist's *penchant* for particular poets or special kinds of poetry, with the implication that they alone are important or representative of the period. From this more dangerous partiality neither Mr. Geoffrey Grigson's *Poetry of the Present* (Phoenix House, 10s. 6d.) nor *The New British Poets* of Mr. Kenneth Rexroth (New Directions, $4) can claim exemption.

Geoffrey Grigson has always been a good hater; and it is to that characteristic that we owe something of the vitality of his pre-war *New Verse*. It is a trait that has, with less happy results, seeped into the Introduction and influenced both selections and exclusions from *Poetry of the Present*. His earlier editorial success was due largely to his instinctive identification with the poetry of objective statement and precise description that characterized the pre-war decade. This has made his choice of the *type* of poetry (individual poems are a different matter) of the 'thirties soundly

representative. But when, despite a token acknowledgement in the Introduction to changing fashions, the same type is taken as the best and most representative of the 'forties too, the resulting anthology is bound to be malformed and unbalanced. *Poetry of the Present* is much narrower in range than its title, or the fact of its including thirty-six poets, would suggest. When birth-date limits of 1904 in Grigson's and 1908 in Rexroth's book are applied, further limbs are lopped from the living tree of contemporary verse. Rexroth's date-line is obviously influenced by romantic-ideological conceptions, but his book is open to fewer objections by reason of his more modest and accurate title, *New British Poets*.

Auden is Grigson's General Arbiter of the '30's and '40's alike, and MacNeice his first lieutenant: 'Auden arches over all, and will long continue to do so' (Rexroth finds his poets underneath other arches; by birth-date he omits Auden altogether). 'He has affected the kind of poems that are written, the sound they make, the shape they assume'; and in MacNeice, he discerningly adds, we have

> *'a poet of his time who also looked back down the perspective of literature, a classically educated and sophisticated poet also firm in the new allegiances.'*

These 'new allegiances' are clearly seen in the poems of Cecil Day Lewis he includes, showing what he calls 'Auden's early work seeping into Day Lewis'; but they reveal nothing of that poet's later more traditional manner or of his more recent debts to Hardy.

The other movement of the '30's—the personal evocations of George Barker and Dylan Thomas—Grigson clearly despises and has no conception of their significance. The two Barker poems included do little to remedy the editorial bias; and the four of Dylan Thomas's, all chosen from early work, fail to reveal his development in clarity, technique, and imaginative power in his last and most important volume, *Deaths and Entrances*.

To pay lip-service after that to the New Romanticism by including eight poems, none of them very exciting, of Derek Stanford's, four of John Bayliss's and seven of James Kirkup's does little to compensate for this radical unbalance—especially as Alex Comfort, Wrey Gardiner, Nicholas Moore, as well as Henry Treece and the Apocalyptics are all absent. The 'Middle East' war poets are represented by a single, deliberately imitative, poem

of G. S. Fraser (who is given a wrong birth date) and five of Bernard Spencer's—but nothing of Tiller, Durrell, Waller, or Keith Douglas. And the poetry of the war years can hardly pretend to adequacy in the absence of Alun Lewis and the curtailment of Sidney Keyes to a single page.

Adequacy of period representation is not, of course, the only criterion of an anthology's quality, especially when the compiler says, a little airily, that he 'has been after poems, not after "representation",' adding, however, 'if the poems are good the representation follows, without being forced.' To discover *that* one must look more closely at the contents. If it was superfluous to include Rex Warner who seems to have abandoned poetry to become a novelist of distinction, his exact contemporary, Norman Cameron, receives, perhaps for the first time in an anthology, adequate representation: his *Shepherdess* is a little gem. But the two chief surprises are probably the youngest contributors—both, alas, now dead: Drummond Allison (1921-1945), evocative and elusive; and the surprisingly mature blend of the archaic and the colloquial in the work of Clere Parsons (1908-1931), whose poems, published in '32, suffered eclipse in the 'Auden dawn'. To include eight poems of Miss E. J. Scovell—and none of another poet so like her in many ways, Anne Ridler—seems a little excessive, but her quiet and technically controlled verse deserves to be more widely known: *A Betrothal, The Giraffe* and *Love's Immaturity* are especially pleasing. If the space given to Norman Nicholson surprises us—nine poems; more than anyone except Auden (18) and MacNeice (12)—all, except, perhaps, *To the River Duddon*, earn their place. Nicholson is a poet whose diction, rhythms and values are alike grounded in his native Cumberland's stark fells and becks: strength, resonance, and certitude are his keynotes. *To a Child Before Birth* should be read beside MacNeice's *Prayer Before Birth*: both are here and both are impressive. Finally, I should like to say how much I, personally, enjoyed two other poems permeated with the breath of the softer landscapes and the more limpid atmosphere of Ireland: *The Swathe Uncut* and the long, unpublished couplet poem, *Conacre*, by John Hewitt.

'The fool sees not the same tree as the wise man,' wrote Blake; and certainly the arboreal vision of Mr. Grigson and Mr. Rexroth radically differ. In distinction from Eliot whom he rather cheaply describes as 'the *poetical* father of intellectual starvelings in a restricted back area,' Grigson sees Auden as 'more

thoroughly the founder and inspirer of a school'. To Rexroth, however, 'the Auden circle was more a merchandizing co-operative than a literary school'; instead of the Auden who will long 'arch over all' he sees his reign as ended: 'If Auden dominated the recent past, Dylan Thomas dominates the present'. While for Grigson many of Dylan's poems were 'half-aimed at meaning but missed it or achieved it imperfectly', for Rexroth 'There can be no question but that he is the most influential young poet writing in England'. These random quotations are enough to distinguish the viewpoints of the two anthologists. However right Mr. Grigson is about the 'thirties kind of poetry (and whether Rexroth admires it or not it *was* the predominant kind) his error is so largely to mistake the 'forties for the 'thirties. To trumpet Auden as The Great Leader—especially after the dubious worth of *The Age of Anxiety*—is, if his publishers and Mr. Christopher Fry will forgive me, a Phoenix just a shade Too Frequent.

Rexroth too, in his Introduction, has what he would call preconceptions about the nature of poetry, but which those who differ from him will certainly call prejudices. I cannot accept all his strictures on Auden or MacNeice, or agree that Auden's 'influence in England is slight'. Nor, because Spender's poetry has adopted a more personal 'Romantic' tone can I agree that he is the most significant of the early disciples of Auden, or that he is, in fact, 'still a living influence on the younger writers in England'. But the vital difference between Rexroth's anthology and Grigson's is that his preference for a certain type of poetry does not warp his selection; he confines it to the decade wherein that type predominates. He says his book 'is not a Romantic collection in the sense of being weighted in favour of that tendency'; but the avowal is slightly disingenuous in so far as the Anthology is of *New* British Poets since 1940, and because significant work like *Four Quartets* and the Auden generation's productions in the decade are deliberately excluded by the 1908 birth date line.

The book does, however, serve to show how wide and pervasive the new Romanticism—'At the least it was a new manner, at the best it was a new vision'—has become. It is certainly true that 'in 1948 the majority of British poets under forty consider themselves Romantics and look on the preceding period as one of Classicism'. It is inaccurate, however, to limit Romanticism to an equation with Anarchism as Comfort does in *The Artist and Social Responsibility*—a view to which Rexroth largely inclines,

and which is at least partly responsible for his surprising bracketing with Comfort—at any rate if he is thinking of their poetry—of George Woodcock and D. S. Savage as 'the most remarkable of the young men who came first to prominence during the war', adding, 'it is significant that they are anarchists, "personalists", and pacifists'. If anarchism is the natural end to which the non-Christian Romantic arrives it is only because it is the logical historical development of that ego-cencriticy (as opposed to theocentricity) which is at the heart of the Romantic idea. Emphasis on the personal vision, individual responsibility, and the unique identity of the artists are certainly among the chief characteristics of the younger poets of the war years and since. To talk of this personalism as Grigson does as 'a slackening of nerves' has a Muscovite ring, and is really rather silly.

The support which Rexroth adduces that Catholic apologetic can give to Romantic anarchism is, however, necessarily limited. It stresses above all the significance and sacredness of the individual and so, of course, is implacably opposed to the political and philosophical implications in the poetry of the Auden school; but nevertheless the individual is only sacred by reason of his relationship and responsibility to God. Anarchism as conceived by Eric Gill and Herbert Read are two very different things. But voluntary submission to the tenents of Christian faith does not turn a Romanticist into a Classicist: it merely changes personalism from a primary to a secondary end; and it is in this sense that Anne Ridler, Norman Nicholson, David Gascoyne, and Kathleen Raine come within its orbit. The first two are not Catholics, by the way, as Mr. Rexroth says, but Anglicans; and Kathleen Raine's sojourn in the Catholic Church was a brief one.

Of the poetry in Rexroth's compilation, primarily personal as Grigson's is primarily objective, one can say at once that, within its self-defined limits, it is thoroughly representative. Unfortunately import restrictions prevent its availability in this country, but Mr. Rexroth has 'passed us on' handsomely to his fellow-countrymen. He himself feels the new Romanticism has established its idiom but not yet written its major works. He would rank Thomas and Barker as precursors rather than members of the movement; but if they are accepted instead as its earliest exponents we may see, in the increasing clarity and wider reference of Dylan Thomas's latest poetry, the direction in which Romanticism may deepen and strengthen itself without sacrifice of individuality. The clarity of Nicholson, Anne Ridler, Gascoyne

and others of the Christian group points another direction—that of being able to interpret individually a widely accepted Mythos. With the Apocalyptic group idiom and myth have alike to be created and the area of communication is notably smaller; but this myth-making is at least a token recognition of the task to be faced. To establish widely communicating corridors of reference down which the individual accents may uninhibitedly travel is one of the Romantics' main problems. We shall rightly expect, as the easiest common denominator for widely different interpretations, that there will be much love poetry written by the new poets—much more than in the 'thirties; and Rexroth's anthology is rich in it. But, love lyrics apart, one often feels these poems to be pleasing but too private utterances; allusive, but not finally communicative. 'The exact cadence of his prayer,' writes Nicholas Moore, 'is difficult to capture' and this is true of more than his poems here—of MacLeod's and Heppenstall's, among others.

It would be carping, however, to complain of so varied a selection that includes the moving qualities of Brenda Chamberlain's *Lament* or Denise Levertov's *Folding a Shirt*; the rich variety of Alex Comfort's six poems; that sees Durrell, Keith Douglas, and Anne Ridler amply recompensed for their omission by Grigson; and Norman Nicholson almost as well represented as by him.

One other point of this book remains to be mentioned. Tribute is paid to the Welsh element in contemporary verse: Lynette Roberts, Rhys, Vernon Watkins, Patrick Evans, and—a new note to many—the musical originality of Eithne Wilkins all find inclusion. But Rexroth sees these poets as thoroughly Anglicized; and with Ireland, despite the powerful sequences of Séan Jennett, *The Quick. And the Dead* and the vigorous freshness of W. R. Rodgers' seven poems—and to whose 'gong and woodwind depth and colour of long vowel and labial' tribute is paid in the Introduction—he is not specially concerned. But he is very much concerned to give full expression to the vigorous Scottish Renascence; and for this purpose, with his Scottish poets, he waives the birth date line of 1908. Macdiarmid is the dominant figure in it and full jutsice is done him both in editorial comment and in his eight poems included. Though to say of them: 'By contemporary taste they have one grave fault . . . they are strangely impersonal', reveals a curious limitation less, one suspects, in contemporary taste than in editorial predilection. For the rest, the movement is represented by the poignant prose renderings of his own Gaelic by Sorley Maclean, the powerful dialect verse of Sidney Goodsir

Smith, the direct simplicities of William Soutar (a little extravagantly praised in the Introduction), *The Ecliptic* of Joseph MacLeod—for which I have considerably less admiration that Mr. Rexroth—Adam Drinan, Robert Garioch and a few others. The absence of Maurice Lindsay and of the specifically Scottish poems of George Fraser is somewhat surprising.

To sum up. Mr. Grigson's collection is, for the most part, pleasant enough and gives deserved prominance to the too little known Drummond Allison and Clere Parsons; but its editor's poetical preconceptions have excluded the greater part of the poets and poems most representative of the second decade he essays to cover and make the whole woefully unbalanced. Mrs. Ridler reminded us once in a poem how, among us even

'. . . the humblest have some sins of omission;'

but Mr. Grigson rather more than most.

Mr. Rexroth's, on the other hand, by its emphasis on *New* and by confining itself to the 1940's lies less open to charges of onesidedness; though 'New' and the 1908 birth limit preclude full representation of the period. But it is widely typical of the 'forties as Mr. Grigson's is not. It gives a rich and varied symposium of the latest Romantic revival, and focuses attention on the very real Scottish Renascence now taking place and perhaps still too little appreciated south of the Tweed. A dialectal glossary for one poem and brief Biographical Notes on the contributors give the book an added value. Such notes, or at any rate the birth dates, could with advantage have embellished Robert Greacen and Valentin Iremonger's selections from living Irish poets in *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (Faber & Faber, 8s. 6d.).

It is almost with relief that we find no Introduction to their selection—merely a prefatory note telling us it is concerned to show 'the main trends in Irish poetry since Lennox Robinson's *Golden Treasury of Irish Verse* (1928)' with increasing emphasis on the period since the death of Yeats in 1939. The bias is 'toward the young and less-known' but 'to give an over-all picture of the contemporary Irish scene . . . poems by certain writers of an older generation have been selected.'

There is nothing to indicate whether any particular poet hails from Northern Ireland or Eire and, with the ignorance of insularity, I must confess all but a dozen of the thirty-four contributors are unknown to me. But there is a breadth and catholicity (sometimes in both senses of that word of interest that gives this col-

lection a balanced diversity within its unity. Most of the contributors are innocent of the 'Auden revolution'. They write in a tradition not consciously influenced by it, and so find no need for consciously reacting against it. There are exceptions, of course; but even some of the Day Lewis poems here, unlike Grigson's choice, show that poet when he has moved out of the Auden orbit. There are echoes, or more truly reflections, of certain other English poetry in the volume. Geoffrey Taylor has developed the gossipy descriptions of Sassoon's *Rhymed Ruminations*; Nick Nicholls shows a genuine assimilation of Edith Sitwell's recent manner; and one of the editors, Valentin Iremonger, has obviously read Dylan Thomas with enjoyment: in his *Lackendarragh* we cannot escape the ebullience of *Poem in October*.

These, however, are small resemblances to place against the essential differences of tone and outlook which the volume represents compared with such English selections as Grigson's or Rexroth's, even when those differences are still not easy to pinpoint. This poetry is born, on the whole, of a land where older, deeper values prevail. 'Change,' as John Hewitt writes, 'is far away

'where a daft world gone shabby makes its war,'

and it is largely of the things that the mechanized, finance-obsessed modern world has lost that these poets sing. Sometimes they speak with the graphic exactitude of John Boyd or Séan Jennett; more often, perhaps, with the abandon of Maurice Craig's *Ballad to a Traditional Refrain* or Leslie Daiken's *Lines Written in a Country Parson's Orchard*. This is a quality largely missing from the English collections: not wit or cynical banter but deep humour that is partly physiological and has little to do with a poet's personal circumstances; that feckless gaiety that, to the rest of the world, is at once the charm and the source of the greatest exasperation with 'the Irishry'. Padraic Fallon's two fine poems, *The Waistcoat* and *Raftery's Dialogue with the Whiskey*, hit off that quality to perfection.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that the predominant note of this book was that of the Ivory Tower or a gay heedlessness. There is plenty of serious thought and writing; only its conception of what is serious is different from that of a world rent by war and ideological strife. Because a zestful concern with living must have its obverse there is sometimes a deep concern with death: with getting it in perspective, as in George Hethering-

ton's *Feathers*; with a child's terror of its inexplicability in Iremonger's *Elizabeth* poem; with its essential horror in Graecen's justly famous *The Bird*; or with man steadily looking at his last end with simple faith and trust in God, as in Robert Farren's *Sleep*. At other times it is immersed in aspects or traits of the poet's native land, as in Donagh McDonagh, John Hewitt—what a good, formal poet he is—or W. R. Rodgers' *Ireland*. Rodgers' gusto, his rich and vigorous adjectival control that reminds us of the early Roy Campbell (without the latter's occasional thinness), his variety, and the philosophical depth and unflagging power of his long *Summer Holidays*, make him, it seems to me, the outstanding poet of this collection, and go far to warrant the high place Rexroth ascribes to him in his Introduction.

Because this collection seems more concerned with perennial things, less either with small personal problems or facets of the changing national or international scene; because it has a rich humour that is seldom in evidence in contemporary English verse, and a raciness of soil that an industrialized community has inevitably lost, it has given me more lasting pleasure than either of the other two, valuable in its quite different way as Rexroth's *New British Poets* is.

HERMANN PESCHMANN.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Coleridge as Critic by HERBERT READ (Faber & Faber, 6s. net); *The Lady's Not For Burning* by CHRISTOPHER FRY (Oxford University Press, 6s. net); *Thor, With Angels* by CHRISTOPHER FRY (Oxford University Press, 5s.); *The White Threshold* by W. S. GRAHAM (Faber & Faber, 8s. 6d. net).

IN 1940 Mr. Herbert Read wrote that it was to the elucidation of the truth of romantic art (an art whose function it was 'to reconcile the contradictions inherent in our nature') that he hoped to devote his energies in the years that were left him. Happily for us these years still show no sign of being drawn to a premature close; and now, after many fruitful ventures into allied territories of thought, he returns in his book on Coleridge to the very heart or essence of the matter.

Coleridge as Critic, we can safely pronounce—although comprising no more than forty pages—is the most important statement on that thinker since I. A. Richards, in 1935, published his *Coleridge on the Imagination*. The main difference between these works can be described as one originating from philosophical as opposed to psychological examination. Mr. Read here employs the former treatment; and part of his task is to show how Coleridge anticipated the course of much future thought.

One important direction in this thought, however—as manifested by Nietzsche with his concept of Dionysian art, Hartmann with his unconscious, Freud with his *id*, Jung with his racial memory, and Croce with his intuition—was what might be called *psychologism*: a recreation of categories of thought resulting from a new awareness of those shadowy emotional forces of the mind which the Eighteenth Century had tended to ignore. From these vital categories of perception, deriving not so much from the substance of thought as from the consciousness of the thinker, the body of philosophies which we know as existentialism has developed; and between their thought and the thought of Coleridge Mr. Read is at pains to point the parallels. Interesting as these considerations prove, I incline to feel some of them a little far-fetched. For example, the likeness between Kierkegaard and Coleridge seems to me a little over-drawn; for although it is true that neither of these thinkers found the highest or the ultimate truth in art, but rather in the word and contemplation of God, the clear-cut opposition of the former's 'either/or' was foreign to the practice of Coleridge. Another way of putting this is to say that while the latter may be regarded as a great Christian aesthetician, Kierkegaard appears an as aesthetician manqué, or rather—as an aesthetician repressed.

For me, the most satisfying portion of this work is the pages which Mr. Read devotes to Coleridge's theory of art and criticism; for if, indeed, Aristotle was correct in saying that a knowledge of something is only obtained by tracing it back to its origin, then Coleridge—poet and critic in one, with the rational power of consciousness which enabled him to focus and analyse the irrational workings of his own creative mind—is truly to be reckoned as our greatest critic—the founder of English romantic criticism: a criticism based on a science of feeling, a sensitive inner science of the mind.

Most illustrative of this auto-empiric approach is the passage

in which Mr. Read treats of Coleridge's understanding of 'method' —a manner of thinking which the latter discovers to apply to both creative and critical thought. Method, in art or criticism, without the animation of 'a nerve that oscillates, or a pulse that throbs, in sign of growth or inner sympathy' is a null and sterile activity of mind. 'Confusion and formality', Coleridge continues, 'are but the opposite poles of the same null-point'. What better definition of stone-cold art—of dry academism—could one possibly desire?

Both the poets who follow, here, can be said to illustrate the definition which Coleridge gave of genius; namely, the power of creating something new; and in the sense that this quality of newness is achieved by means of the unanticipated, we may—without too great a violation—describe them both as romantic writers.

In Christopher Fry—the older of these two—this feeling of newness is positively startling—the guilding intuition being so direct—as when, for example, in *The Lady's Not For Burning*, a woman observes to the man with whom she has just fallen in love,

> *You have cut yourself a shape on the air, which may be*
> *My scar,*

or when, in reply to her lover's speech that the vile mortality of human existence (man's life, we know, is nasty, short, and brutish) makes passion a poor and meaningless joke, she replies:

> *You are Evil, Hell, the Father of Lies, if so*
> *Hell is my home and my days of good were a holiday.*
> *Hell is my hill and the world slopes away from it*
> *Into insignificance. I have come suddenly*
> *Upon my heart and where it is I see no help for.*

One of the attributes of imaginative writing is, according to Coleridge, the power of reconciling opposites or discords; and apart from the many felicitious examples of the handling of language in this fashion to be found in the pages of Mr. Fry's plays, an even deeper illustration of this curious polar synthesis lies at the root. In *The Lady's Not For Burning* the conflict arises from a debate between the death-wish and the impulse to love; whilst in *Thor, With Angels* a similar argument takes place between the destructive instinct and the feeling which prompts us to mercy and compassion.

This dialectic, in its turn, is responsible for the play's final shape and the final impression its produces. *The Lady's Not For Burning* is described as 'a Comedy', but concerning the understanding of that term, the author has been led to add a connotation of his own. 'It might be more helpful', he writes in a 'foreword', 'if he (the reader, that is) thought in terms of light, of inconstant April sunshine, or sunset, twilight, and full moon; of human intelligence in a dance together, sometimes with nothing but buoyancy, sometimes with a seriousness which has been sufficiently mocked by distress to be able to mock back'. Comedy, we can see from this, is a very subtle category for Christopher Fry—clearly a good deal more subtle than was tragi-comedy for the Jacobeans. To say that the splendidly sustained high-spirits which bubble unceasingly through his drama is in no way related to the benzedrine giggles would be but to make a negative distinction; whilst to venture that the poet's knowing lightheartedness, his informed and mature vivacity, have something philosophical about them would be to clumsily claim too much. What we *can* venture to suggest is that our categories are always being broken by the excursions of genius, and that our difficulty in pigeon-holing the work of Mr. Fry springs from just such an impact.

The element of surprise, of the unexpected, which makes it possible to regard W. S. Graham as a romantic poet, is that of verbal innovation. This writer remakes his world from scratch, and the shape which his poems assume in the consciousness are singularly unlike those which other poetry produces: 'I build', he writes in another book, 'an illiad in a limpet's dome'. (Nor can one insist too firmly at this point that the resemblance which these poems bear to those of George Barker and Dylan Thomas is one of outward appearance rather than of a common intention.) 'I am,' writes the poet, 'continual arrival', stating in other words his clean 'fresh start', his desire to handle language as a near-virgin metal. There are, none the less, in his lines, the echoes of Hopkins and of Joyce; though the borrowings are of a local rather than of a structural nature.

Briefly, we may characterize his personal quality as that of a kind of architectural onomatopoeia—an imitative use of sound which conjures up the essential properties of his theme rather than rendering its surface manifestations. This is particularly borne out in the many poems in this last volume which deal with drowning and the sea:

Their bubbled seabell sky and the rushing shoulders
With screaming bundles of foam over their home fathoms
Lock them shaped under out of their smiling life-stories.
My eyes on shore stare the crying spray to my mind,
Light lost not to build a lament or pay dry prayer.
(from *The Poems of Drowning*)

I am, for myself, however, convinced that his best poems are those in which he avoids this curiously patented circumlocution, and writes—as in the first poem of this volume—with a direct and yet evocative style, one of the finest naked lyrics by any of the poets now under forty:

Since all my steps taken
Are audience of my last
With hobnail on Ben Narnain
Or mind on the world's crest
I'll walk the kyleside shingle
With scarcely a hark back
To the step dying from my heel
Or the creak of the rucksack.
(from *Since all my Steps Taken*)

DEREK STANFORD

MASKS AND THE MAN

W. B. Yeats, Man and Poet by DR. A. NORMAN JEFFARES (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 21s.).

IT is somewhat unfortunate that Richard Ellmann's study *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* has not been published in England to coincide with that of Dr. Jeffares; both authors have had access to a large quantity of unpublished material—diaries, letters, Mss.—in the possession of Mrs. W. B. Yeats, Mrs. Maud Gonne MacBride and others. And it would have been interesting to compare both their sources and interpretations.

Dr. Jeffares' primary object has been scholarship: he does not aim at any original interpretation or attempt to square Yeats' circle to fit any philosophical system of his own. He quietly gets on with the narrative, revealing for the first time many facts in

Yeats' sexual life just hinted at in Mr. Joseph Hone's rather circumspect biography. (We already know the principal landmarks, of course.) Yet Dr. Jeffares, probably out of regard to the feelings of Yeats' relatives, having related the necessary facts, swiftly passes by, like the horseman of Yeats' epitaph.

A good deal of space is given to an examination of the Yeats-Maud Gonne relationship, the poet's *grande passion* that like sheet lightning illumines so much of the poetry. It was Maud Gonne who inspired the sequence of rose poems.

Maud Gonne would not have the poet as lover; she needed a man of action, a man who would oppose England with a fanaticism parallel to her own; she found this man in John MacBride (father of the present Eire Foregin Minister) whom Yeats loathed and despized until execution seemed to cast him in nobler mould. In Mrs. MacBride's early widowhood Yeats again proposed marriage, but of course was rejected; he admitted to feeling a little relieved, possibly dreading anti-climax. He probably feared, too, that her violent Republicanism, together with domesticity, would smother his poetry.

'I am not happy without you,' said Yeats.

'Oh yes, you are, because you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that. Marriage would be such a dull affair. Poets should never marry . . .' was the reply. In the matter of Yeats-Mrs. MacBride one is definitely not eavesdropping on a great man; an understanding of his private life is essential to an understanding of Yeats' poetry for, apart from Gaelic myth in his early period and intellectualized frenzy in his latest, he drew ceaselessly on autobiographical material.

Dr. Jeffares largely uses the poetry as illustrative of the growth of Yeats' mind and does not attempt to show its relationship to the general poetry of the period. In this way (and by drawing on published and unpublished prose) he builds up a massive anthology, chosen less for its merit as literature than for the light it sheds on the making of a poetic personality. He analyses the self-protective masks, looking for the man behind them; he shows how in the end Yeats came to scorn the independent Ireland ('fumbling in a greasy till') of which he dreamed in youth, because of its petty censorships and Roman Catholic obscurantism, and its refusal to honour the Anglo-Irish tradition of Swift, Berkeley, Goldsmith and Burke. The ageing poet eventually

sympathized with Fascism, without perhaps fully understanding its implications:

> *At the moment I am trying, in association with an ex-cabinet minister, an eminent lawyer and a philosopher, to work out a Social theory against Communism . . . what looks like emerging is faschism (sic) modified by religion.*

Of this and other political interests Dr. Jeffares comments:

> *He did not want to be taken seriously, yet to be dubbed 'irresponsisble' would not have pleased him.*

The probability is that, disgusted by the vulgarities and contradictions inherent in democracy, and envious in others of that life of action which his 'anti-self' wished for, he compensated by a delight in violent men such as O'Duffy of the Blueshirt movement and Kevin O'Higgins, an authoritarian Right-wing politician. English tolerance and humanitarianism bored him.

It is an open question how much of the arrogance of his old age was due to the passing of youth and to success, both in the sense of recognition (Nobel Prize, etc.) and in social intercourse—he was greatly pleased to hear the Swedish court's opinion that, unlike so many Nobel prizemen, he had the 'manners of a courtier'. At last the boy who in the 1880's 'inked his socks so that the rents in his boots might not be visible' was the friend of aristocrats and an honorary member of the Athenaeum, whose entrance fee he once found too high. But despite arrogance, pose, pseudo-science, snobbery, anti-democratic ideas, hostility to poetry of 'pity' like Wilfrid Owen's, and fabrication of ancestors, Yeats remains a poet of greatness: the compellingly 'simple' public speech of his late phases more than compensates for failings that might otherwise have been intolerable.

He himself had said in 1926: 'Whatever I do poetry will remain a torture'; for us it must remain a delight in its pagan and elemental magic. Dr. Jeffares, out of a vast erudition, helps us to understand how that magic, in its several forms, came into being.

ROBERT GREACEN.

After Every Green Thing by DANNIE ABSE (Hutchinson, 5s.); *The Imprisoned Sea* by JAMES REEVES (P.L., 5s.)

THESE books remind me of the war years—not in style or content, but because then we had innumerable small books of greater or less promise: personally I do not regret the buyers' market in poetry as much as some people, even if a number of my own books, which added to the glut, have been pulped. In the lean periods, the verse which is published tends to be less the outcome of fashion or the product of tension. Abse, I think, has undoubted promise (this is the first really worthwhile book in the Hutchinson poetry series—it looks as if they have found a better reader) and the rawness of some of his work, especially where it mixes with an elegaic, rococo perception of decay, looks like a product of age, not a permanent affliction. His vision still lacks sharpness, and so does his language. Medical students have a peculiar problem, which is always appearing in what they write—they have to reconcile wish with reality at an abnormally early age, and the reality is rubbed in, so that they cannot dodge it. Rowdiness, religiosity, or escape into fantasy are all possible evasions: Abse seems to be one of those who make successful scientists as well as poets, because he make no attempt to bolt. He has not yet solved the problem in his work—probably the best liveable solution is to set about the task of modifying the unpleasant features of reality, which is the function of medical science, and I rather think that the advent of this realization may sharpen what he has to say, even if it drives him partially at least out of poetry into science. The conflict itself is the material of very nearly all great art, and a writer who is large enough to cope with it acceptably has great opportunities.

Reeves is less obviously up against a choice—in some ways he is more accomplished, but there is possibly less behind the accomplishment. The poeticism also seems rather more a part of him than it is of Abse. Reeves' *Faces,* however, is one of those small pieces which stick in the mind: *The Happy Child* is another. If either of these two writers has much to contribute later on, I think it will probably be Abse, but so far he has written nothing quite as controlled as these two poems. In any case, after the masses of small collections which I have read or written about between now and 1940, it is a relief to say that both these were worth writing and worth publishing.

ALEX COMFORT

Dylan Thomas by HENRY TREECE. (Lindsay Drummond. 7s. 6d. XIII. 159).

MR. TREECE'S book strikes a sympathetic chord. For fifteen years (like himself) I have been prying slowly deeper into the spiralling recesses of Mr. Dylan Thomas's imaginative perspective, sometimes enraptured by vistas of wonder and surprise, more often 'imbrangled' in the preposterous mazes of his baroque rhetoric. Like Mr. Treece, I am still uncertain whether Mr. Thomas's verse is the product of a buffoon with a flair for poetry or of a poet with a taste for buffoonery.

This does not mean that Mr. Thomas's work has not been accepted and enjoyed as well as understood (in some measure) by the literate minority in these islands. Nevertheless, there must be many an ardent reader of poetry, like myself, who can at times see in one of Mr. Thomas's poems only a goulache composed of the chewed fag-ends of inspired phrases, pitched helter-skelter into the spittoon of memory and discharged in a dishevelled stream as a result of some pathological agitation.

To say that Mr. Treece, during the past years, has been moving towards the same conclusions as myself is not in itself a commendation of his book. What is admirable about it is the methodical approach he employs in attacking his critical problems. His brief introduction, noting the Dylan Legend and the progress of critical reactions to successive Dylan productions, is purposefully short and most necessary. Equally necessary are the succeeding chapters on Mechanistic Idealogy and Surrealism, relating Thomas's emergence to his contemporary cultural environment and the literary anarchism it engendered.

Getting down to his subject, Mr. Treece summarizes most effectively, under the heading of General Characteristics, the effects which Thomas's poetry must have on the reader at first sight. In dealing subsequently with influences, and in particular with Thomas's debt to Hopkins and to Welsh poetic forms, Mr. Treece has produced the best material yet offered on these very pertinent matters. The same may be said of the chapter headed The Medievalist, expounding a conception of the poet which has not hitherto received the consideration which the author shows it to deserve.

Mr. Treece tries to assess the impact of successive sections of

Mr. Thomas's work. He does not altogether succeed in clarifying stages of development, but one has more than a suspicion that that is merely because they are not there. In asking and trying to answer the question 'Is Dylan a Fake?' the critic shows an unusual conscientiousness and a convincing honesty.

Coming, as it does, after all these, the section devoted to Analysis of a Poem (*Because the pleasure bird whistles*) is probably the most valuable in the book. It demonstrates better than anything else could have done the conclusion at which readers of Mr. Thomas or Mr. Treece may arrive independently, which is, that however thorough may be our approach to the poems, by methods suggested and applied, there will remain large tracts of poetic territory in which Mr. Thomas has set no landmarks for the uninitiated, no beacons for the unenlightened poetry-lover as opposed to the purblind poet-taster. Unlimited research among philological curiosities, remote archives of incunabula, painstaking accumulation of personal reminiscence and biographical detail might make each of Mr. Thomas's poems easy to understand and invest it with force and unity. Is such labour, justifiable in the case of a poet dead over three hundred years ago, justifiable in the case of a modern poet because he appears to be writing ten years before his time?

Mr. Treece's book gives Mr. Thomas all the attention he merits and as much praise as he deserves. Its one weakness seems to be that it makes no mention, among other references, of the valuable chapter on Dylan Thomas in Mr. Francis Scarfe's *Auden and After*.

ANEURIN RHYS.

The White Pony. An anthology of Chinese Poetry from the earliest times to the present day, edited by ROBERT PAYNE (Allen and Unwin, 16s.).

ROBERT PAYNE is the young American Orientalist who wrote that astonishing 'tour de force' *The Lord Comes*—a life of Buddha in the form of a novel—before he had visited India. Both in that book and in *Singapore River* he had shown a talent for building up atmosphere with the painstaking thoroughness of a Chinese writer of characters. Now in *The White Pony* this attention to detail has produced what must be

the standard anthology of Chinese poetry for all time. Its excellence makes previous collections appear like albums of pressed flowers paling before the comparison of a living garden.

In his Introduction, Mr. Payne tells us that the Chinese do not share our passions. 'Their greatest passion (until recently) was for decorum and for some kind of understanding with Heaven. Though they sang love-songs, they did not exalt romantic love; and though they hated wars, they seem to have seen war in a spirit of fatal expectancy, as though they knew it would always recur'. Later, he mentions that the 'spiritual landscape of the West, the landscape in which T. S. Eliot has his home, is very similar to North China . . . . yet the Chinese poets, who live in such a landscape, are not conscious that they have been betrayed: out of the granite hardness and small comfort of their home they have built a world in which they have formed their own peace'.

It is perhaps interesting to seek for points of comparison with the poets of the West, and in Tao Teh Ching we find an anticipation of Eliot's philosophical repetition,—

They are called shapes without shape,
Forms without form.

Or, in Chu Yuan, writing three hundred years before the birth of Christ, we find the sensuousness of the best Tennyson:

In sorrow and sadness I dream of my Lord,
Who is sailing with oars of cinnamon and sweeps
of cassia,
Breaking through ice and heaped-up snow.

For almost the first time, one realizes that Chinese poetry has more than the delicacy of sentiment with which Arthur Waley and Helen Waddell had made us familiar. Although Tu Fu, who is described as a Chinese Baudelaire, can write:

Languidly the butterflies frolic over the parted curtains

he can also describe in his *Journey to the North*, the sufferings of wounded soldiers and children, or say, grimly enough:

But one thing remains—how shall I make a living?

Here then, is richness. From Tao Yuan-Ming who loves chrysanthemums to the woman poet Li Ch'ing-Chao who celebrates the Mid-Autumn Festival. From the Emperor Li Shih-Ming, in whose reign the first Christian missionaries arrived, to

Mao Tse-Tung who is Chairman of the Military Council of the 8th Route Army. From the luxury of mulberries to the snow covered by new stains of blood. Perhaps to end, I may quote Li Ho, the poet who talked to ghosts:

I mount the turret steps to welcome Spring. New spring returns.
Dark yellow the willow-buds, the water-clock in the palace is slow.
Faint spirals of mist sport and creep over the fields.
In this cold green a dark wind settles on the grassbeards.

What poet or translator could do more?

JOHN BAYLISS.

Beyond the Terminus of Stars by HUGO MANNING (Phoenix Press, 5s.).

EVERY now and again a book of verse appears about which there is an unusual divergence of opinion; critics praise and condemn the same aspects of the work, and all for different reasons. This means two things; firstly that the book is worth noting and secondly that its peaks and depths are sharply defined. A responsible critic has said that Mr. Manning's book is shapeless, yet the very attributes which prompt this conviction seem to me to make for shape. In fact, I think shape is the most marked quality of this sequence.

But it is not an instantly recognizable shape, for it is elongated here, foreshortened there, which is the artist's way of expressing Shape, a term in which both form and theme are presumably included.

The origins of these poems belong to civilization, following a sort of *Waste Land* theme, relating however to no particular stage in civilization but to the whole civilized situation, and lacking Mr. Eliot's apparent suspension of moral judgment. Whereas the *Waste Land* figures are particularized, called out by name, as it were, Mr. Manning generalizes by such simple technical means as the use of the definite article, as in

Strange merchandise creeps through the unnatural canals,
The fiddles are broken and the signposts do not speak.
In mansion and palace where walls are mildewed,
The dogs are dying and indifferent to strangers.

where to have said '*a* mansion' or merely 'unnatural canals' would have reduced the allusiveness. Prototypes of the sequence such as 'Carlo the passionate', 'the prince with the musical saw', 'the Laughing Devil' and 'Magician' differ from Sweeney and Doris of the *Waste Land* in that, whilst both groups are of the same type, the former is of a more universal order.

The individual poems possess a ritual, cabbalistic note which is well suited to this conception, and an emotional climax occurs in each poem, which is repeated in the whole sequence. Unusual combinations of rhythms intensify the incantatory effect. At the peak of the sequence stands Lola, civilization's camp-follower, uttering a sophisticated lament:

Where
Where
Where did I die?
In Teneriffe, Cartagena
Or under Viennese sky?

This poem voices a remarkable tumult after which the sequence gradually follows a quieter pattern, handled with a good deal of technical ability.

One of the dangers of the intense sincerity which is evident in Mr. Manning's work is the pitfall of bathos. Occasionally Mr. Manning descends into the pit with such lines as 'Weeps with angels' or 'Sees God's broken heart' but has not stayed in for long. Such phrases are oddly out of place in an otherwise original work.

Although these poems appear best in the context of their sequence, they stand well alone, and while they cannot be called lyrics, it is their inherent lyrical quality that sustains them. Such a combination of theme and form might well have been disastrous.

MURIEL SPARK

Selected Poems, EZRA POUND (New Edition), (Faber and Faber, 12s. 6d.).

THE further republication (in larger and more attractive format) of this twenty-one-year-old selection has come at a timely moment. Ezra Pound's present ignominy and misfortune is obscuring, even in the most lettered minds, his true position among modern poets and critics. We cannot,

however, judge the man without reference to his works, because it is into these that Pound has most expressively put his real self, his *ratio vivendi*.

Mr. T. S. Eliot's selection gives us the essential introduction to the poetry, and any study of Pound should be prefaced by a proper acquaintance with it. What do these poems in fact reveal? They do not reveal the eccentric and dyspeptic rebel, Pound the abusive crank, a legend created by ignorant journalism and a superficial acquaintance with certain of the Cantos. They do reveal a man utterly convinced of the proper nature and function of poetry, and utterly sensible of its possibilities, both creative and critical. Not for nothing did Eliot dedicate *The Waste Land* to him: we see as an integrally developing process the growth of the giving, the sympathy and the control which Eliot prescribed as remedies for a sick society, divining that Pound, *il miglior fabbro,* was better fitted than he to administer them.

In this selection we have represented to us Pound the lyricist, Pound the epigrammatist, the elegiac Pound, Pound the translator, Pound the satirist, multivalently and multilaterally creating standards of poetic expression and criticism which are not abstract, but directly related to experience in history. Thus Pound may write an epigram which reminds us of Martial, but which we see to be characteristically Pound. Pound means us to think: 'if Martial wrote to-day, his method would be to write a certain type of epigram, thinking that thus he can best express himself. Profiting from Martial's experience, Pound, too, has written epigrams believing them to have possibilities consistent with his poetic endeavour which he deems to be in part coincident with those of Martial. They are not, however, epigrams in the style of Martial, but in the style of Pound.' In this way can it only be said that Pound remains an innovator, because he does not merely *draw upon* the experience of others, but recreates it in his own terms.

And so with all Pound's 'genres', which are the experience of the past relived through the senses of the present, and also the experience of the present understood by the revision of the past. Moreover, Pound's translations are usually not mere renderings but—and this applies even when they are least successful—commentaries upon the problems raised by the poem, problems of understanding as well as of traduction, and signposts pointing to significant but neglected or misunderstood authors. With a sympathy which outpaces his genuine if occasionally spiky scholar-

ship, Pound revalidates for the contexts of the present and the immediate past the human experience of the Chinese poets, Sappho, Anacreon, Martial, the early Provençal and Italian peots, Dante and the stilnovisiti Villon and Laforgue, experimentally re-synthesizing history and literature in preparation for the more catholic and 'philosophical' Cantos, yet he remains always and only Ezra Pound.

Mr. Eliot's preface, which he has retained unaltered, is most important, and, after twenty years, has lost nothing of its force and penetration.

B. McK. SOPER.

Four Poems by Rimbaud: The Problem of Translation. BEN BELITT (Sylvan Press, 7s. 6d.).

TRANSLATORS tend to forget the literal meaning of words. There is even a literal meaning of 'translator'. He must be St. Christopher to his author and *carry* him *across* the stream which divides the two languages. His prowess can be judged by the amount of splashing suffered by the author before he is deposited on the far bank, if in fact he gets there at all. Mr. Belitt, in spite of heroic efforts, left Rimbaud to swim for it.

The trouble is, Mr. Belitt has no poetic sense. Besides a factual and instinctive knowledge of both the languages he is working in, a translator must have a stage sense. A dancer who can put over a brilliant can-can does not necessarily long to appear as Giselle, because the part will probably not suit her so well. No one will invite her to interpret a rôle which has nothing in common with her own nature. A translator has his big chance in choosing what to translate, particularly if he is translating poetry into poetry. It seems odd therefore for Mr. Belitt, whose style is more suited to Roman historians and German critics, to choose a French poet. He is essentially turgid, and Rimbaud is movement and light. Having failed to show originality in making an apt choice, Mr. Belitt has attempted to make up for it in another way. He has supplied two translations, one which is literal, for purposes of 'information', and one which attempts to 'communicate poetry *as poems*, to be read in their own right as poems'. He has been particularly careful not to print the originals opposite the 'poetic' renderings, in order to foil those 'readers, who, in effect, pre-suppose the existence of an imaginery paradigm, and preside over

the translator's function like umpires in a tennis match'. How else would a reader of average linguist ability and human curiosity look at the book? If the reader does not understand French the question does not arise. Mr. Belitt finds it strange that 'in an epoch of methodologies the semantics of translation has so far gone unexamined'. He somewhat disappointingly withdraws at this stage and leaves his translations to speak for themselves.

The unkindest and most honest thing to be said is that the literal near-prose renderings are much more readable than the 'poetic' versions. They are at least unpretentious. The Rimbaud-Belitt arrangements resound with the plonk of utility sabots. Why litter the poems with 'and' in an accentuated position?

For what conceivable reason should the translator, in his 'poems' interpolate smug pronouncements such as 'So much the worse' (Les Poètes à Sept Ans). Half-hearted moral judgments are the last way of putting Rimbaud over.

The astonishing thing about so much of the exciting poetry produced in France last century is that it has a solid base of classical metre and rime. In *Bateau Ivre* most of the rimes are full and gorgeous, but the effort of reproducing them would be superhuman. When Julian Bell and Charles Maurron translated this poem they did not try, but they did at least reproduce something of the texture and flow which make the original. Mr. Belitt would profit from studying Roy Campbell's translation of *Les Chercheuses de Poux* or Norman Campbell's version of *Voyelles*. It *is* possible to preserve poetry, sense and rime all at once, but it needs both work and inspiration. Translation is no easier than creative writing, and a poet *manqué* need have no hopes of succeeding as a translator instead.

Mr. Belitt deserves some marks for courage, for the dreary virtues of slogging and for providing an object lesson in how poetry should not be translated. He does prove, however, that a sober prose version is readable and useful. Otherwise anyone seriously interested in poetry can surely learn enough French to make his way through *Bateau Ivre* or *Les Premières Communions*. A dictionary and a feeling for poetry will get one much further than the reading of 'improved' versions, in any sense of the word.

MARGARET CROSLAND

To the Editor
Poetry Quarterly 12th May, 1949

Sir,

W. B. Yeats has been dead ten years and it is now impossible to obtain any of his books, except by the rarest chance in the secondhand book shops. Is it not time that something was done to get his chief works back into print?

The extraordinary situation has arisen that a poet of European significance, a poet comparable in importance to Valéry, Rilke and George is rapidly becoming unknown to the people of his own speech, is indeed, simply not there for the new generation that did not know his work during his lifetime.

During the past three years I have repeatedly searched every bookshop in London known to me for copies, in any condition, of *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair.* They are not to be found. On a recent visit to Dublin, I found the same lack there. Apart from the 1895 *Poems* and occasional volumes of prose, Yeats's works do not come into the shops.

The need for a new complete edition of the poems is therefore acute. Now that paper is again available, it is astonishing that the publishers have not reprinted. If this omission is due to commercial considerations, then I propose that a fund should be started to finance the printing. Here, too, is an opportunity for the Arts Council to help. It must surely be possible to raise from private subscription and the public funds a sum sufficient to print, say, 5,000 copies of a collected edition. Cannot *Poetry Quarterly* make a start by opening a subscription list?

Yours etc.

ALEXANDER HENDERSON

To the Editor
Poetry Quarterly 8th May, 1949

Dear Sir,

I should like to take this opportunity of correcting Mr. Giles Romilly as to what constitutes 'prose-verse'.

In a criticism of three of us (James Kirkup, John Bayliss and myself) made in the course of a broadcast-review of Mr. Grigson's anthology, *Poetry of the Present Time,* he accused Mr. Bayliss—among other things—of writing in a kind of 'prose-verse'.

It is possible, of course, that such devices as those of assonance, alliterative balance, and occasional interlinear rhyming have not yet been recognized, in general, as valid verbal tender by this

critic; or that he assents to them in name, but fails to recognize their particular instance.

Now opinion is free but fact is sacred as Scott of *The Guardian* observed; endorsing which I can only add that any critic capable of such a factual bêtise or blunder as that perpetrated by Mr. Romilly should be restrained from giving it circulation through the medium of so informed and objective a mouthpiece as the Third Programme.

Prompted by the natural suspicion which we now entertain for Mr. Romilly as critic, I may ask what literary credentials he possesses for dealing with writers in so off-hand a fashion? Where, I would ask, are the tokens of his taste: his own books or poems or volumes of essays; for failing these more substantial proofs his columnar activities do not impress?

We know, of course, he is well acquainted both sides, so to speak, of the barricades; but poetry, I would humbly suggest, is neither an adjunct to the national cigar nor yet a small side-show to the red Revolution.

Yours and etc.

DEREK STANFORD

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